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ABSTRACT

Over the last several years, substantial dissatisfaction has emerged with the use of norm-referenced, standardized tests for evaluating the academic performance of students. In particular, dissatisfaction has stemmed from concerns including the lack of overlap between the content of tests and the curriculum, the limited sensitivity of norm-referenced tests to index short-term academic progress, and the lack of relationship between test results and instructional decision-making. In this study the acceptability, as rated by school psychologists, of using curriculum-based assessment and standardized, norm-referenced assessment measures for evaluating academic performance was examined. Using a random survey of 1989-90 members of the National Association of School Psychologists, 249 participants completed the Assessment Rating Profile (ARP) after reading a description of assessment data collected on a hypothetical 4th-grade student with academic difficulties. Participants in each condition were presented with data from one of two different scripts: the curriculum-based assessment and the standardized testing assessment. Each participant was exposed to only one condition. Following these scripts, participants completed the Assessment Rating Profile, a measure designed to assess the acceptability of the assessment method described in the script. Results indicated that although both assessment methods were found to be acceptable, curriculum-based assessment was rated significantly and consistently as more acceptable than standardized assessment practices. (ABL)

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Acceptability of Curriculum-Based Assessment by School Psychologists

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Abstract

The acceptability, as rated by school psychologists, of using curriculum-based assessment and standardized, norm-referenced assessment measures for evaluating academic performance was examined. Using a random survey of NASP members from the 1989-90 membership list, a total of 249 (49.8%) participants completed the Assessment Rating Profile after reading a description of assessment data collected on a hypothetical student. Results showed that although both assessment methods were found to be rated as acceptable, CBA was rated significantly and consistently as more acceptable than standardized assessment practices. Initial psychometric characteristics of the ARP, a measure designed to evaluate the acceptability of assessment procedures, are also reported.

Acceptability of Curriculum-Based Assessment by School Psychologists

Over the last several years, substantial dissatisfaction has emerged with the use of norm-referenced, standardized tests for evaluating the academic performance of students. In particular, dissatisfaction has stemmed from concerns including the lack of overlap between the content of tests and the curriculum (e.g., Bell, Lentz, & Graden, in press; Shapiro, & Derr, 1987; Good & Salvia, 1988), the limited sensitivity of norm-referenced tests to index short-term academic progress (e.g., Friedman, 1990; Marston, Fuchs, & Deno, 1986) and the lack of relationship between test results and instructional decision-making (Salmon-Cox, 1981). Response to these concerns has lead to the development of several alternatives to published, standardized, norm-referenced assessment including outcome-based assessment (Spady, 1988), authentic assessment (Archbald, 1992), and curriculum-based assessment (CBA) (Tucker, 1985). Among these, CBA has received considerable support and attention among school psychologists.

It is important to note that the term "Curriculum-based assessment" does not refer to a single method for conducting academic assessments. Indeed, multiple models of CBA have been developed. Shinn, Rosenfield, and Knutson (1989) identified four models including those developed by Gickling and colleagues (Gickling & Havertape, 1981; Gickling & Thompson, 1990), Blankenship (1985), Howell and Morehead (1987), and Deno (1985).

In addition, Shapiro and Derr (1990) described and contrasted models discussed by Deno and Mirkin (1977) as well as Shapiro and Lentz (1985). While there are some differences among models, all have in common a core assumption of assessing student performance from the curriculum. Each model aims to improve the links between assessment and instruction, and all use brief (sometimes timed) assessments of skills taken from curriculum materials.

Use of CBA appears to be significant among practitioners. Shapiro and Eckert (in press) recently reported that in a national survey of school psychologists, 45% of the respondents indicated that they had used CBA to some degree. Despite the apparent increased use of CBA as reflected by the large scale attention it has received in the literature, little is known about the degree to which CBA is considered acceptable by school psychologists.

The concept of acceptability has been particularly well recognized and researched with regard to the use and application of various interventions for non-academic problems. A rich literature base has developed in intervention acceptability as rated by parents (Reimers, Wacker, Cooper, & DeRaad, in press), teachers (Witt, Elliott, & Martens, 1984), and students (Elliott, Witt, Galvin, & Moe, 1985). Although much of this literature has employed analogue methods and may be somewhat limited by the use of simulation studies, results from these investigations suggest strong relationships between the perceived acceptability of treatment strategies and the willingness and success of treatment

implementation.

There has been relatively little research related to the acceptability of assessment measures. Thurlow and Ysseldyke (1982), in a national survey of school psychologists and teachers, showed that each professional group had significant differences in their choices of measures when conducting a psychoeducational evaluation. Whereas teachers identified informal measures as more important than standardized measures in the assessment process, school psychologists consistently rated standardized tests of intelligence (WISC-R), achievement (WRAT), and perceptual-motor skills (Bender-Gestalt) as more preferred. Several researchers have investigated the self-reported usage of various assessment methods by school psychologists (e.g., Goh, Teslow, & Fuller, 1981; Hutton, Dubes, & Muir, 1992). These studies have showed that school psychologists tend to rely heavily on individual standardized, norm-referenced achievement tests when conducting most academic evaluations.

It seems logical that the attention devoted to understanding the variables affecting the acceptability of intervention strategies should equally be devoted to the acceptability of new assessment techniques. Clearly, the perceived value of CBA is likely to have an impact on its use and acceptance by school psychologists. At present, there have not been any investigations which have been specifically designed to directly determine the degree to which assessment methods such as CBA are viewed as acceptable.

The purpose of the present study was to provide an initial examination of the acceptability of CBA as compared to more traditional, published norm-referenced standardized tests in conducting evaluations of academic performance by a national sample of school psychologists. In addition, the study presents initial psychometric characteristics of a measure designed to directly determine the perceived acceptability of various assessment strategies, the Acceptability Rating Profile (ARP) (Kratochwill & Von Sommeren, 1984).

Method

Participants

A total of 500 individuals from the 1989-1990 membership directory of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) were randomly chosen for inclusion in the study. The sample was selected in proportion to the representation of NASP members across the five regions of the United States (Northeast, Southeast, North Central, West Central, and Western) according to the 1989-90 membership. Assignment of each participant was made randomly to one of two conditions: standardized testing (STD) or curriculum-based assessment (CBA), with each group receiving a somewhat different set of materials described below. Assignment to conditions was done so that both conditions contained a total of 250 potential participants, with each condition having representation from each of the five regions proportional to NASP membership. Three weeks after the initial mailing, postcard reminders/thank you's were sent to all participants in an attempt

to encourage completion of the study. From these 500 individuals, a total of 249 useable responses were received (49.8%); 123 (49.2%) of these were from the STD group and 126 (50.1%) from the CBA group.

The responding sample for each condition used in the analyses are described in Table 1. Differences between the two groups as tested with a Chi-squared were not significant for any of the demographic variables (degree, years as a school psychologist, or degree earned). Most of the sample were female (73.6%), and had earned an Educational Specialist or Master's degree plus 30 credits (69.8%). Approximately one-third (31.3%) of the sample had been employed 3 or less years, 40% of the sample had worked between 4 and 12 years, and the remaining 28.9% reported employment for 12 or more years (2 respondents (.8%) did not answer this item).

Insert Table 1 about here

Materials and Procedure

Each participant received a five page packet. After the cover letter and a request for some demographic information, a brief description of a hypothetical 10-year old, fourth grade child named "Chris" was presented. Chris was described as having academic difficulties. The description indicated that he had been in a special education resource classroom for reading and math (about two hours per day). Participants were told that

Chris was performing significantly below grade level in reading and math and also has problems writing. It was also indicated that he did not concentrate on his assigned work.

Following this description, an "assessment script" was presented. Participants in each condition were presented with data from one of two different scripts. Each participant was exposed to only one condition. Following these scripts, participants were asked to complete the ARP, an 18-item, Likert scale measure designed to assess the acceptability of the assessment method described in the script.

STD Condition. The script for the STD condition indicated that one way the school psychologist assessed Chris' learning problems was through the administration of a battery of tests. Results of the Wechlser Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R) (verbal, performance, and full scale IQ scores and related classification), Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT) (grade equivalents, percentile, and standard scores for all subtests), and the Koppitz score with age equivalent and percentile for the Bender Visual Motor Gestalt Test were presented. A total of 24 bits of information was provided (defining a bit of information as a test score or classification).

CBA Condition. The script for the CBA condition indicated that the school psychologist assessed Chris' learning problems by "directly assessing the student's skills via probes taken directly from the child's reading and math curriculum."

Although the term "curriculum-based assessment" was not used to describe the methods employed for evaluation, the data provided in the script were all metrics common to CBA.

Reading was described as being assessed by asking Chris to read aloud for one minute selected passages from the fourth grade book of the basal reader where Chris was being instructed. It was indicated that he was then asked to continue reading aloud in other books of the series until he could read at least 50 words correct per minute. Results of this assessment were provided with scores of Chris's words correct and incorrect per minute at the 2-2, 3-1, 3-2, and 4-1 levels of the series, along with district wide means for students at each level of the series.

Math was described as being assessed by asking Chris to complete sheets of addition, subtraction, and multiplication facts and seeing how many problems he could correctly complete in one minute. Results were reported for addition and subtraction of 2-digit numbers with and without regrouping along with multiplication of 2-digit by 2-digit numbers. Data were reported as digits correct per minute for each skill along with a district mean for fourth graders on each skill.

A total of 26 bits of information were provided on the CBA assessment script, again defining an information bit as a score or classification assignment.

Assessment Rating Profile (ARP). The ARP contains 18-items, each rated on a 6-point Likert scale that ranges from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (6). Item content is varied such

that marking Strongly Agree could indicate either a negative or positive view of the assessment depending on the wording of the statement (see Appendix A). Due to these reverse-worded questions, five items (#5, #6, #8, #15, and #16) were reverse scored. The ARP was developed to measure an individual's perceptions of the acceptability of assessment scales and methods (Kratochwill & Von Sommeren, 1984). The measure is a modification and refinement of the 20-item Intervention Rating Profile (IRP) which was designed to assess teacher's perceptions of the acceptability of classroom interventions (Witt & Martens, 1983). The primary changes made were the omission of questions pertaining to teacher implementation, rewording of questions to assess perceptions of the acceptability of assessment methods versus classroom interventions, and the addition of questions examining acceptability of assessment methods. Lower scores on the ARP are associated with assessments judged to be more acceptable. Given that this study represents the first use of the ARP, no previous psychometric characteristics of the measure have been reported.

Results

Psychometric Characteristics of the ARP

Both the internal consistency and factor structure of the ARP were examined by combining data from the SDT and CBA conditions, as well as examining each condition separately. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was found to be overall .94 across participants (SDT= .91; CBA= .95). An exploratory principal-

components analysis with a varimax rotation for the combined conditions data resulted in a three-factor solution (eigenvalue > 1.00), with one strong 14-item factor appearing to assess overall acceptability (accounting for 54.9% of variance), a second two-item intrusiveness factor (accounting for an additional 10.2% of the variance), and a third two-item assessment appropriateness factor (accounting for an additional 6% of the variance). The three factor solution accounted for a total of 71.1% of the variance. Table 2 shows the rotated factor matrix.

Insert Table 2 about here

Conducting the exploratory factor analysis on each condition alone resulted in an exact duplication of the factor structure when the groups are combined for the CBA condition. For the SDT condition, a single item, fourth factor was extracted which included one of the items previously found on the acceptability factor. Examination of this item suggested the possibility of an additional teacher perceived "best practices" factor. In both SDT and CBA factor analyses, approximately 71% of the variance was accounted for in each condition.

In general, both the high internal consistency and resulting factor analysis suggest that, with only a few exceptional items, the ARP appears to be a strong measure of a unitary characteristic. An analysis of item content suggests that the ARP includes: (a) 15 items measuring whether an assessment method

is generally acceptable (Example: "This would be an acceptable assessment strategy for the child's problem."); (b) two items measuring whether the assessment is intrusive to instructional time (Example: "This procedure was overly intrusive into the student's classroom time."); and (c) one item measuring the risks or dangers that may occur from the assessment method (Example: "This assessment would result in negative side-effects or misdiagnosis for the student.")

Comparison of Conditions

Data were analyzed using a 2 (conditions) X 18 (questions 1 to 18) MANOVA. Results found differences to be statistically significant (Wilks Lambda= .5659, F= 7.97, df=18, $p < .001$). Univariate F-tests were conducted for each question (df= 1,204) resulting in statistically significant differences between conditions (all $p < .01$ except question #10 which was $p < .05$) for all questions except one (Question 15: "This procedure was overly intrusive to the teacher's time"). In every case, the direction of the difference found suggested that CBA was a more acceptable assessment strategy than STD. Table 3 displays the mean ratings for each question of the ARP.

Insert Table 3 about here

An examination of the mean response levels for each item by psychologists under each condition showed that school psychologists rated CBA as a more acceptable strategy in general

than STD. On all questions but one, mean scores on the ARP were below 4 ("Slightly Disagree") on the scale. In contrast, psychologists mean ratings under the STD condition exceeded 4 on the 6 point scale for 10 of 18 items. Even when mean levels in both conditions resulted in ratings of "agree (2)", respondents in the CBA condition scored significantly lower than the STD condition. The only item on which this trend was not evident was question #15, "This procedure was overly intrusive into the teacher's time." On that item, differences between the conditions were not significant.

Discussion

The results of this study provide an initial indication that CBA may be viewed by school psychologists as a more acceptable method for conducting academic assessments than published, standardized norm-referenced testing. Indeed, the data analysis indicated almost unequivocal preference toward CBA across many different questions related to acceptability. This included questions about a the potential use of the assessment methods beyond the type of cases presented (item #2), the potential effectiveness of the measure to identify the child's problem (item #3), a perception of the fairness of the measure (item #11), as well as how much the psychologist liked this approach to evaluation (items #13, #14). Likewise, CBA was viewed as having potentially more benefits than STD for children (item #17) and more likely to result in the development of intervention strategies to change behavior (item #18). The only item on which

CBA and STD were viewed as not different was on how intrusive the measures might be to teacher time (item #15).

It is important to note that although CBA always resulted in more acceptable ratings, standardized testing was rated as slightly acceptable (mean score below 4 on regularly scored items or above 2 on reverse scored items) on certain questions. This included whether the assessment approach might be acceptable to teachers for other problems (item #2), whether or not the problem was severe enough to warrant the type of assessment conducted (item #5), the willingness to use STD with students whom the psychologist might actually assess (item #7), the belief that the assessment might produce negative side effects (item #8), that the method would be useable for a variety of children (item #9), and that it would be consistent with the approaches used by the psychologist in the past (item #10). These results clearly suggest that while CBA was preferred by respondents over standardized testing, it is still considered a very acceptable form of evaluation for academic skills problems.

The present study also provided examination of the initial psychometric characteristics of the Assessment Rating Profile (Kratochwill & VonSommeren, 1984), a measure designed specifically to evaluate assessment acceptability. Results of these analyses suggest that the ARP has one, very strong unitary factor which accounts for the largest proportion of the variance. Termed as the "acceptability" factor, 14 of the 18 items of the ARP appear to consistently be rating a similar construct.

Likewise, the strong internal consistency found in the measure suggests the ARP to potentially be a useful instrument for future studies. Future studies may want to consider reducing the ARP to include only the 13 items which loaded on the single, initial factor. One additional issue related to the ARP is that it is organized in such a way that lower scores rather than higher, represent greater acceptability. This may seem counterintuitive and is indeed opposite the scoring method used in the IRP, the measure upon which the ARP was based. While a linear transformation of the data from this study could easily have been conducted so that higher scores reflected greater levels of acceptability, it was felt that since use of the ARP had not previously been reported in the literature, the data should be reported exactly as the measure was derived. Studies employing the ARP in the future may want to reconfigure the protocol so that higher scores would indeed reflect greater levels of acceptability.

Despite the consistent and strong findings of the present study, a number of important limitations of the research must be noted. First, as with all survey type research, results are limited by potential respondent biases. Return rates in this study were around 50% of the initial surveyed sample. While this return rate is better than many studies employing survey methods, it is by no means a high return rate. As such, one may argue that those who chose to complete the measure self-selected into the study and therefore the results are likely to represent

biased views.

Although the potential for selection bias certainly exists in the present study, the design of the study offered some protections from selection bias. In particular, the use of a between groups design meant that potential respondents only viewed one set of assessment scripts. As such, those more favorable (or unfavorable) to CBA or STD methods were given equal opportunities to respond. The fact that the return rate between the two conditions was almost identical offers some suggestion that response bias may have been at least equal across conditions, if not eliminated.

While the use of a between groups design certainly helps to address the potential selection bias problem inherent in a survey type study, it also unfortunately introduces another potential limitation. Because respondents only view one set of assessment scripts, they are not offered the opportunity for cognitive comparisons. In other words, psychologists were asked to rate the script as acceptable or not acceptable, but were not offered an alternative for comparison. It is entirely possible that the use of a within-subjects design where each respondent rates <u>both</u> CBA and STD scripts would result in somewhat different findings. This is clearly an empirical question and warrants additional investigation.

One additional and important limitation of the present study was its analogue nature. While respondents may report CBA to be more acceptable than STD, this may not be the case in actual

practice. Indeed, Shapiro and Eckert (in press) reported that although 45% of respondents of their survey indicated using some form of CBA in their practice, additional questions to specify the nature of CBA use and to confirm their report suggested that far fewer school psychologists are actually engaged in the activities that would suggest they really are using CBA.

Beyond the clear limitations of the study, it was very interesting that even without affording respondents direct comparisons between methods, CBA was consistently rated as more acceptable than STD, even on items where STD was considered highly acceptable. These results strongly suggest that school psychologists should be strong advocates for the use of CBA as well as standardized norm-referenced testing. Given the significant movement of school psychologists toward alternative approaches to the delivery of school psychological services (e.g., Graden, Curtis, & Zins, 1988) and assessment methods (e.g., Shapiro & Kratochwill, 1989), on-going efforts to evaluate the acceptability of such methods are important and needed. Future research should continue to explore and validate the psychometric characteristics of the ARP, as well as examine its applicability to assessing acceptability of assessment methods such as behavioral assessment, outcome-based assessment, or authentic assessment. Likewise, investigations which explore the perceived acceptability of CBA and standardized norm-referenced testing for assessing academic problems by other school personnel such as teachers are clearly needed.

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Table 1. Gender, Degree, and Years Employment of Respondents by Conditions (N=249).

Gender

	Conditions		
	SDT	CBA	Total
Male	39 (31.1%)	29 (23.0%)	68 (27.3%)
Female	84 (68.9%)	97 (77.0%)	181 (73.7%)

Degree

	Conditions		
	SDT	CBA *	Total*
Master's	8 (6.5%)	4 (3.2%)	12 (4.8%)
Master's + 30 cr.	63 (51.2%)	54 (42.9%)	117 (47.2%)
Ed.S.	19 (15.4%)	25 (20.0%)	44 (17.7%)
Ph.D. or Ed.D.	26 (21.1%)	28 (22.4%)	54 (21.8%)
Other	7 (5.7%)	14 (11.2%)	21 (8.5%)

* data for one participant were missing these information.

Years Employed

	Conditions		
	SDT	CBA **	Total**
0-3 years	39 (31.7%)	39 (31.5%)	78 (31.6%)
4-7 years	21 (17.1%)	20 (16.1%)	41 (16.6%)
8-12 years	27 (22.0%)	29 (23.4%)	56 (22.7%)
12+ years	36 (29.3%)	36 (29.0%)	72 (29.1%)

** data for two participants were missing these information.

Table 2. Rotated Factor Matrix for Combined Conditions

Question #	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1	.8642	-.0308	.0202
2	.5374	.2669	-.2361
3	.8387	-.0472	.1692
4	.9191	.0319	.0519
5	-.0608	.2630	.6836
6	.5817	.1451	.3956
7	.8345	.0804	.0420
8	.5031	-.1331	.5473
9	.8349	.0992	-.0734
10	.7736	.0668	-.2492
11	.8691	-.0101	.1662
12	.8885	.0307	.1346
13	.8478	.1118	.1578
14	.8863	.0363	.1929
15	-.0369	.9223	.0006
16	.1665	.8530	.2554
17	.8841	.0954	.2020
18	.7658	-.0014	.2980

Table 3. Mean ratings across conditions on each item of ARP.

Question #	Conditions CBA	STD	p
1	3.10	4.12	***
2	2.97	3.53	**
3	3.57	4.74	***
4	3.11	4.35	***
5++	2.08	2.52	**
6++	4.09	4.96	***
7	2.76	3.86	***
8++	2.92	3.48	***
9	2.64	3.66	***
10	3.50	3.74	*
11	3.31	4.48	***
12	3.31	4.40	***
13	3.01	4.18	***
14	3.52	4.77	***
15++	2.40	2.00	n.s.
16++	2.13	2.43	*
17	2.81	4.10	***
18	2.81	4.10	***

Note. The ARP scores range from 1 to 6. Lower scores are associated with greater acceptability.

++ These items are reverse scored (6=1, 5=2, etc.).

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

Appendix A

COPY OF ARP (Need Kratochwill & VonSommeren permission).

Assessment Rating Profile

The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain information that will aid in the selcetion of assessment techniques in schools. These techniques will be used by teachers of children with behavior and learning problems. Please circle the number which best describes your agreement or disagreement with each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. This would be an acceptable assessment strategy for the child's problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Most teachers would find this approach to assessment appropriate for problems in addition to the one described.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. This assessment should prove effective in identifying the child's problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I would suggest the use of this assessment to other psychologists.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. The child's problem is not severe enough to warrant the use of this assessment.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. There are better ways to assess the problem described.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I would be willing to use this assessment with one of my students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. This assessment would result in negative side-effects or misdiagnosis for the child.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. This assessment would be appropriate for a variety of children.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. This assessment is consistent with those I have used (or would use) with my students.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Go on to the next page.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11. The assessment was a fair way to identify the child's problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. This assessment is reasonable for the problem described.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. I like the procedures used in this assessment.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. This assessment was a good way to handle this child's problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. This procedure was overly intrusive into the teacher's time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. This procedure was overly intrusive into the student's classroom instruction time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Overall, this assessment would be beneficial for the child.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. This assessment is likely to be helpful in the development of intervention strategies to change behavior.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Comments regarding this procedure or this questionnaire.